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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2008

In Today's Papers

Turkish PM Embarks on Peace Tour of the Middle East
Media outlets criticize perceived tolerance for Israel from the West and herald Prime Minister Erdogan as a peacemaker in search of dialogue and diplomacy in the Arab world regarding the crisis in Gaza. Liberal Radikal criticizes the West in, "No One Is Trying to Stop Israel," as "The West Blames Hamas." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak carries the headline, "East and West Speak Differently" regarding Gaza, as "Iranian President Ahmadinejad and Syrian President Assad have consistently called on Israel to stop their massacres in Gaza and end the embargo," while, "The EU blames Hamas for violating the ceasefire and calls the Hamas attacks 'unacceptable.'" Reports note PM Erdogan is seeking to bring Arab countries together for a unified response to the crisis before this weekend's OIC meeting. Mainstream Hurriyet reports, "As Israel steps up its attacks against Gaza, Erdogan is embarking on a peace tour and will call on Hamas to stop their rocket attacks against Israel. Erdogan wants the parties in the region to give diplomacy and dialogue a chance." Particularly, Hurriyet notes, "Erdogan seeks to end tensions among the Arab nations which are divided over the Iraq war," in order to "mobilize the Islamic world on an Arab Peace Plan before Obama takes office." Mainstream Sabah reports, "Erdogan will ask Syrian President Assad to use his influence over Hamas," to encourage peace before "Erdogan meets with Palestinian President Abbas in Jordan." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports Ankara is sending "significant aid" for the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Islamist-oriented Zaman and NTV report Ankara will send "five ambulances and a total of 330 tons of food to Gaza."

In mainstream Vatan, Bilal Cetin says, "Washington is the only actor that can stop Israel." Okay Gonensin in the same paper thinks the PM's peace effort is a domestic political show and a demonstration of his will to become an Islamic world leader. Meanwhile Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak's Resul Tosun calls on the Turkish government to force NATO intervention with Israel and threaten to suspend Turkey's NATO membership if NATO refuses to intervene.

Meanwhile, leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet criticizes the PM by saying he was "used" by Israel prior to the Gaza attacks. The paper

reports that last week Israeli PM Olmert was in Ankara and met with Erdogan for five hours. The statement after the meeting said Erdogan "expressed his gratitude for the constructive approach and political determination shown by Olmert." Cumhuriyet says this statement "was interpreted by Hamas to mean that Israel would not launch attacks into Gaza and thus they were caught off guard when Israel launched its strikes." In addition, Cumhuriyet reports, "As a newly designated rotating member of the UNSC, Ankara will soon bring together members of Hamas and members of the Palestinian administration to talk peace. These talks will be conducted in the name of the UN."

Editorial Commentary on PM Erdogan's Peace Tour of the Middle East

In mainstream Vatan, Bilal Cetin considers the PM's Mid East trip "an effort to prevent the escalation of tensions in the region," particularly "to prevent a possible escalation of violence in South Lebanon." However, Cetin notes, "Washington is the only actor that can stop Israel."

Okay Gonensin of Vatan also thinks the PM's effort is "a domestic political show and a demonstration of his will to become an Islamic world leader."

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak's Resul Tosun calls on the AKP government "to force a NATO intervention into Israel and to threaten to suspend Turkey's NATO membership if NATO does not agree to intervene in Gaza."

In liberal-intellectual Radikal, columnist Murat Yetkin urges the

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Prime Minister "to remember Turkey's EU aspirations while he is focusing on the Middle East. The closer Turkey gets to the EU, the more influential Turkey will be in its efforts in the Middle East."

Fikret Bila in mainstream Milliyet writes, "PM Erdogan does not want to visit Israel at this point. However he may change his mind based on the outcome of his Mid East regional tour."

Editorial Commentary on Looking Back and 2008, Looking Forward to 2009

Oral Calislar writes in liberal-intellectual Radikal, "Despite some setbacks, there is still room for optimism when 2008 is analyzed closely. There were good developments regarding democracy. For example, the AKP was not closed by the judiciary, efforts toward dialogue were sought with Kurds in Turkey and northern Iraq, and a group of Turkish intellectuals initiated an online Armenian apology campaign."

Ergun Babahan writes in mainstream Sabah, "Turkey finished 2008 with an increased level of multi-cultural awareness and that alone is a reason to be optimistic about 2009."

Ali Bayramoglu says in Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak, "In 2008, the ruling AKP experienced a recession in popularity. With an overly-nationalistic tone on the Kurdish issue and its growing distance from liberals, the AKP is moving closer to the nationalist opposition party MHP's political rhetoric."

A cartoon from today's mainstream Sabah is entitled, "The New Year Comes." Two men assist a badly beaten Old Man 2008 and tell the 2009 New Years baby, "Wait just a minute. He (2008) doesn't even have the strength to stand."

Kurdish Controversy

Mainstream Sabah reports that the mainly Kurdish opposition party DTP drew attention to the controversy between TRT's Kurdish broadcasting and the court cases against the DTP mayors. DTP Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir's lawyer said that "there are 13 cases against Baydemir for using the Kurdish language when sending invitations. Under these conditions, it means that TRT also is committing a crime by broadcasting in Kurdish. This is a vast controversy."

DTP Leader Turk Apologizes to Assyrians and Armenians for 1915 Incidents

Mainstream Hurriyet and Sabah report that DTP leader Ahmet Turk, "apologized for the events of 1915 during a DTP delegation's visit to the Syriac Culture Association in Midyat." Turk said, "Our Assyrian and Armenian brothers suffered in those days. Today, our Kurdish brothers are facing same kind of suffering."

'Bug' Found in Opposition CHP Headquarters

Media outlets report the main opposition CHP officials said they have found a bugging device in the offices of the party's deputy secretary-generals Algan Hacaloglu and Mesut Deger. CHP's head auditor Mustafa Ozyurek said, "In the recent past, similar wiretapping devices have been found in some flowerpots sent to the party." Ozyurek lashed out at the ruling AKP, saying the government should protect against such illegal eavesdropping.

Meanwhile, leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet and mainstream Hurriyet report the Justice Ministry adopted a decision which authorizes the Justice Minister to order the wiretapping of judges and prosecutors without seeking a court decision. In "Boundless Violations: Justices Will Be Wiretapped," Cumhuriyet says a provision added to the ministry's Inspection Board Regulation authorizes Justice Ministry inspectors to wiretap justices and prosecutors. The Union of Justices and Prosecutors (YARSAV) is appealing to the Council of

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State (Danistay) for the annulment of the provision. YARSAV Director Omer Faruk Eminagaoglu said the authorization would harm the independence of the judiciary. "The authorization given to Justice Ministry inspectors will move them away from their independent position described in the Constitution, and to a position which can be defined as 'legal intelligence units,'" Eminagaoglu said.

FM Babacan to Address Kosovo Parliament in Turkish

Islamist-oriented Zaman reports that FM Ali Babacan will pay a visit to Kosovo between January 14 and 15 and will address the parliamentarians at Kosovo Parliament's General Assembly. Babacan is expected to deliver his speech in Turkish. 100 Turkish businessmen will accompany Babacan to Kosovo.

TV News:

CNN Turk

Domestic News

- 22 suspects were detained in operations against al-Qaeda in Kocaeli.
- Former PM Erbakan's Saadet Party will hold a protest in Istanbul on January 4, 2009 in order to protest against the crisis in Gaza.
- Turkey's state-run TRT television will launch Kurdish-language broadcasts January 1.
- Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said the appointment of PM Erdogan's family doctor as the Rector of Istanbul University shows President Abdullah Gul has lost his impartiality.
- More than 55,000 people have lost their jobs in the province of Bursa in 2008.
- 205 kg of heroin was discovered in two trucks attempting to enter Turkey from Iran via the Agri border crossing. Two Macedonian drivers were detained and the investigation continues.

International News

- Turkish fighter jets bombed targets in northern Iraq Tuesday. There were no immediate reports of casualties.
- Russian President Dmitri Medvedev signs a constitutional amendment extending presidential terms from four years to six years.
- Russian academic Igor Panarin predicts the U.S. will disintegrate into six parts in 2010.

JEFFREY